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Mediation Without Armistice

THE WISCONSIN PLAN

Adopted by the

National Peace Conference, at Chicago, Feb. 27, 28, 1915; Embodied in a Memorial to the President by the Wisconsin Legislature April 1, 1915

Can a means be found by which a conference of the neutral powers may bring the moral forces of the world to bear upon the present war situation, and offer to the belligerents some opportunity, involving neither committal to an arbitrary programme nor compromise of the convictions for which they are fighting, to consider the possibility of peace?

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Can a means be found by which a conference of the neutral powers may bring the moral forces of the world to bear upon the present war situation, and offer to the belligerents some opportunity, involving neither committal to an arbitrary programme nor compromise of the convictions for which they are fighting, to consider the possibility of peace?

In answer to this question there is offered here a plan for MEDIATION WITHOUT ARMISTICE.

When great crises have arisen before, mankind has too often gone through them blindly and paid the costliest price for its lessons. It is one of the conventions of war that once blood has been shed, no further rational consideration of the questions at issue shall be attempted. Today if our scientific spirit and intellectual development are worth anything, we should be able, under the stress of emergency, to break through the paralysis of tradition and seek a rational way out, before the inexorable forces of nature shall have wrung from us the uttermost farthing.

Let us imagine for the sake of argument that all the nations now fighting were to awake tomorrow morning in their right minds, able to survey the wreck already caused, to sum up the suffering, the human loss, the economic loss; able each to comprehend the motives that have driven the other into battle; able to realize the futility of vengeance, the unwisdom and wrong of trying to crush or humiliate a race, the folly of continued competition, the advantages of co-operation. What under these circumstances would be the natural thing to do? Or, again, let us suppose that the *neutral* nations came to their senses; for is it not possible that they too have been paralyzed by a traditional mode of thinking? Suppose that they were able to attack the problem with utter honesty, simplicity, and courage. What would be the natural thing for the neutral nations to do?

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It is the general conviction that so far the neutral governments are without sufficient opportunity to bring any definite influence to bear on the war situation. The belligerents distrust each other too much for armistice. And they see nothing to be gained by mediation at this stage, for it seems to them that a speedy settlement would mean compromise, and compromise would mean that hostilities would have to be resumed in the near future. Obviously, then, if the neutral powers were to bring their official influence to bear at present, they would have to *mediate without armistice and without the specific permission of the warring powers, and in such a way as not to endanger neutrality, and would have to make a proposition that would not involve the evils of compromise.*

In view of the foregoing considerations, what, we ask again, would be the natural thing for the neutral nations to do—those neutral nations to whom the task of thinking open-mindedly for the world is, for the time being, entrusted? The natural thing for them to do would be to come together in conference and endeavor to frame a reasonable proposition. They would append to it all conceivable arguments for its adoption, every possible appeal to the self-interest of every warring nation. They would then submit the proposition to the governments of all the warring nations simultaneously, together with the following question:

Will you agree to adopt or consider the accompanying proposition as a basis of peace if and when the governments of the other warring powers will agree to do likewise?

The proposition itself would have to be worked out in detail by experts. It would be an attempt to discover those principles which underlie the welfare of all and which would constitute a foundation for permanent peace. It would doubtless suggest the establishment of something in the nature of a Peace League to be protected by a co-operative armament. It may be that the conference would have difficulty in agreeing upon the terms of the initial standing proposal. In that case several proposals could be put forward at the same time, representing various theories of sound settlement.

If any government should reply in the negative, reply in-

definitely, or refuse to reply at all, the neutral powers would place before it the following requests:

(1) If at any time while the war continues, you are willing to adopt or consider our proposition, or a modified form of our proposition, as a basis of peace provided the other warring powers will do likewise, we beg that you will notify the conference of the neutral powers.

(2) In the meantime the conference of the neutral powers, WHICH WILL SIT WHILE THE WAR CONTINUES, will be grateful to receive any information which you may care to give as to your ultimate wishes—that is, as to the maximum which you desire to obtain—in order that the conference may be aided in an effort to discover at the earliest possible moment a plan of settlement such as may appeal to all as worthy of consideration.

The conference would then proceed to frame and put forward further standing proposals.

The immediate advantages of such a course of action from the point of view of the neutral nations would be (1) that it avoids the necessity of securing an armistice or the permission of the warring powers to mediate; (2) that it avoids the necessity of passing judgment on the past; (3) that it endangers no one's neutrality; (4) that it gives an opportunity to ascertain the attitude of the belligerents by an appeal to the future; (5) that it would put forward a radical plan free from the evils resulting from compromise—a plan which, if it could shorten the present war, would tend also to prevent similar wars in the future.

Now what practically could such a course of action on the part of the neutral powers be expected to accomplish?

First, what is the minimum gain that could be expected with reasonable confidence? The minimum gain would be the lifting of the programme of pacifism into the realm of serious political consideration. As a proposition made seriously from governments to governments, it would gain a hearing, it would have a psychological effect, such as no private propaganda could ever give it. It would focus the thought of the world at least momentarily on international righteous-

ness. It would give a concrete expression to the inarticulate passion of all idealists both in the peaceful and the troubled lands. And if ever in the world's history there was dire need of such a common expression, it is now.

By voicing an international political faith, the movement would tend, furthermore, to give a new solidarity to popular sentiment in those lands whose population is made up of many races. For instance, it would relieve large numbers of Americans of European birth or ancestry from an intolerable sense of estrangement from many of their fellow Americans. It would enable them to join hands in one great task and to weld into one enthusiasm their affection for their fatherland, their loyalty and devotion to America, their friendship for the whole world. Hence the racial diversity of the United States would be rendered one of the most potent forces making for peace.

And should the neutral nations of the world accept the invitation of one of their number to send representatives to a conference, such a deliberative body, sitting as long as the emergency continues, would present a spectacle of profound significance—one that would go far to restore the shaken faith of humanity and enable it to set its face with new hope toward the goal of ultimate World Federation.

As to the question what is the most that the plan might accomplish, we should hesitate to base serious argument upon the answer. Yet it may be worth while to consider for a moment some of the forces which might conceivably be brought into action. First, what might the proposition gain from the motives of self-interest (1) in peoples, (2) in governments?

Since the initial standing proposal is not a matter of secret diplomacy, but is made openly before the face of all people, it will come to the knowledge of the people of Great Britain and her colonies through the British and American press. Neutral periodicals pass freely into Canada. Neutral views of the war are discussed freely in England. The British censorship is strict with regard to the immediate facts of the campaign; but though there may have been some attempts

on the part of the government to check free discussion in the press, it would be easy to bring evidence to prove that there is no considerable censorship in England of ideas and opinions. A British editorial * indicates the policy which should be adopted at the end of the war: "What we have to do is to get rid of the Balance of Power and substitute for it a League of Peace with as much power as possible on one side. It is not a question of disarmament. The League of Peace, like the policeman, must be better prepared than anyone else to use force if necessary. The idea is not visionary unless democracy is only a vision. The vast majority of the people of the three great Western powers—England, France, and Germany—as well as of Belgium, Holland, and Scandinavia, are quite ready to give their support to such a League. At the moment the people of Germany are suffering from delusions (not unlike some of our own delusions) which might make them disinclined to consider the proposition. But their interests and inclinations are essentially identical with ours, * * * and they will not long stand out against a plan which will relieve them permanently of what has long been an intolerable burden of fear and suspicion."

We have thus an opportunity to appeal to a body of opinion already strongly disposed to look with favor upon a proposal for a settlement that will make for permanent peace. Now the temptation to sound thinking which such a proposal presents will increase steadily in force with the increase of economic pressure. Moreover, the plan will enlist on its side the argument of fear itself, the strongest force which is at present making for war. The great argument with which Great Britain has appealed to her people and colonies is the danger that defeat would mean at the least increased armaments in the future, military enslavement, the weakening of the democratic principle. This is the appeal that has marched out the armies of the British Empire. But to such a motive our proposition would make an appeal yet stronger, for it

* *The New Statesman* (London) November 14, 1914.

would promise security not only from the aggression of a victor but from the revenge of a vanquished foe. It would promise freedom, nationality, democracy in no uncertain terms.

It will be objected that at present, nevertheless, national hatred is too bitter to permit the sane consideration of peace proposals. We cannot too much emphasize the point, however, that national hatred is born of and nourished by fear. So far as the twentieth century is concerned, pure hatred is too non-material and at the same time negative a motive to keep masses of people fighting in the face of severe economic pressure. If fear be eliminated, hatred will die a speedy and natural death. Moreover it would be easy to bring evidence gathered from partisan periodicals to show the compunction which each side feels in destroying the other, the kind treatment accorded to prisoners, the friendly relations between the soldiers in the trenches. All would be thankful to return if they could to "normal humane living." Again, the contemplation of a proposal based on the principles of universal welfare will of itself tend to diminish national hatred and to hasten the time when settlement will be possible. And this goal may be nearer than we think. It is fear, we repeat, rather than hatred which keeps the nations fighting, fear which is strong enough for a time to overcome the great counter force of economic pressure. But economic pressure is a force inexorable and final, which must sometime and in some way bring a cessation of hostilities. It is the one formidable ally of those who would fight the battle of peace.

The very emulation of the belligerents should spur them to adopt the creditable course. They have all turned to the neutral peoples, vociferous in self-justification. Each nation says that it is not to blame; that it did not seek the war; that it was forced to fight in self-defence immediate or anticipatory; that it has to contend with those with whom it would fain have been friendly; that it has no motive of cruelty, only that motive of tenderness to its own which for the time being has rendered necessary a stern closing of the heart to pity for

others; that the means it has used are justified by a vital end and a desperate necessity; that the motive is ultimately the preservation of an ideal and the welfare of the human family. If these protestations are sincere—and it is by no means clear that we have adequate reason for doubting them—it is not strange that we have felt unable to commit ourselves to any final judgment of the moral attitude of any party to the conflict. We cannot estimate past motives; we cannot distinguish perfectly between the actions of peoples and the actions of governments, between the responsibility of one nation and that of another. And there is a sense in which all are to blame. We are all human together, stumbling out of darkness into a twilight of imperfect knowledge. Nevertheless it is true that by so persistently courting our approval, whether sincerely or with a sordid motive, the belligerents have laid themselves open to any ethical challenge we choose to propose to them; and there is a test of sincerity to which they may even now be brought and to which they have given us the right to bring them—one that lies not in a scrutiny of the past but in an appeal to the future.

The strength of the proposal for the formation of a Peace League lies in the fact that it offers a good bargain. While the concessions it demands of each government are large, the advantages it presents, even from the point of view of what Mr. G. Lowes Dickinson calls the "governmental mind," are by no means small. All peoples would gain (1) immediate relief from intense economic pressure and excruciating suffering, (2) future freedom from military taxation, (3) security from future wars, (4) relief from the prospect of further loss of trade. All governments would gain a desirable exit from a difficult situation. The world would gain the safety of western civilization, which is now threatened. Hence, there is no question that the appeal to the people of all countries would be very strong, especially after economic pressure had become extreme. At the least, the governments of all countries would find it difficult, once the argument of self-defense was wrested from them, to keep the people enthusiastic for the continuation of the war.

But since the best hope of a peace movement lies in the will of the people, what is gained by appealing from government to government instead of through the propaganda of peace organizations to the people themselves? First, as we have seen, government action is the most effective action because the most national, the most immediate, and the most conspicuous. Secondly, by such government action as we propose, we give the people of another country the invaluable aid of a ready-made proposition. We have relieved them of the difficulties, especially great in time of war, of initiation, formulation, organization, of getting a hearing with their own government. The campaign of those individuals and groups who desire to ally themselves with our movement is already organized. All they have to do is to importune their government to *say yes*. And thirdly, we have put into their hands this argument, that the plan has already been brought from the realm of the ideal into the realm of practical politics, that there is already in the world one government at least that regards it seriously as a political expedient.

Through the plan of independent and continuous mediation without armistice—that is, through making simultaneous standing proposals to all—there is thus a chance, slight indeed and dependent upon the turn of circumstances, of materially affecting the duration and the outcome of the war. Be it observed that such a device would bring a steady psychological pressure to bear on the governments; it would keep them under perpetual temptation to the right course. At present each side is resolved to fight practically to extermination rather than yield. Our proposal would hold before each, one hope of escape from indefinitely continuing a self-destructive struggle. Such are the possibilities of practical appeal on the ground of the sordid motives—fear, pride, desire for relief from suffering.

But there are other motives than sordid ones to be considered. Humanity is not a shallow thing. When we think of the motives of mankind in the mass, we get into the habit of thinking of those motives which we can estimate and turn to practical account; and these are the lower motives; the higher

motives are incalculable. Idealism is from the point of view of practical politics an uncertain and therefore a negligible quantity; but it exists. That it is not a practical force is due to the fact that we have not yet learned to liberate and use it. And today it is singularly active, singularly accessible. Though in neutral countries moral conditions are approximately normal, in the countries which are at war they are very far from normal—not abnormally low, but almost superhumanly high. The very unity and cohesion of a race has carried the individual beyond his normal range. Each people is as a single family; there is neither high nor low, rich nor poor, but a brotherhood of men. No man counts his life dear unto himself. All are fighting with unquestioning devotion for homes and fatherland, for language, institutions, traditions, for all that they hold most sacred and most dear. Whatever we may believe about the folly or the deliberate wrong-doing of governments, the fact remains that each people is in a state of spiritual exaltation. Individuals are everywhere thinking, feeling, suffering, facing the ultimate issues of life and death. Their senses are sharpened, their spirits sensitized to the significance of what had become commonplace, to familiar landscapes, to the associations of home, to the ideals of the race, to its heroism and its poetry, to the symbols of its religion. This thing is like a tidal wave of the sea; it has drawn deep. And in the hour of their aspiration and their agony, they have turned to us, beseeching our understanding and approval. Powerful and sophisticated peoples have cried out to us with the helplessness and simplicity of children, as if we for the time being represented to them that World Spirit of reason and wisdom which alone can rescue them from irreparable tragedy.

We may believe with truth that their desire for our good will has been somewhat a matter of material self-seeking; but only the most shallow cynicism can fail to discern that it is also much more. We have only to turn to their own periodicals to know that each nation, in the confused complexity of its motives, has been swept by a genuine passion of self-

justification—a passion that indicates in each a sense of loyalty to a standard of national conduct. It is our unique opportunity to propose to each the supreme ethical challenge which, whether or not any can rise to the point of accepting it, must for ourselves and for them endure through the coming centuries as a tangible expression of the international ideal.

Now between the maximum for which we hope and the minimum which we may expect to obtain, there is one possible gain that should not be overlooked. Even though ideal proposals be rejected, a conference of perpetual mediation would supply a means of defining the issue and hastening the discovery of such a basis of settlement as would normally be reached at the end of the war. The device of such a conference might well be adopted at the beginning of any war, for any problem that justifies bloodshed is worthy of the collective, systematic thinking of the race. And it is possible for each party to a conflict to be somewhat mistaken as to what the other supposes the main issues to be. Any confusion of issues must result in a tragic waste of effort. Especially is there danger of such waste in the present war. In the vastness of the issues involved, in the nature of the deadlock, in the interest which the neutral powers have in finding a solution, the world problem is unprecedented and may well demand a *pioneer method of treatment*. Noble races are engaged in a death struggle, kindred peoples who have no real quarrel, who would rather be friends, but who cannot come to an understanding because they have no true opportunity to communicate. So far as the peoples are concerned, the war began on a few days' notice. There was no time to talk then; there is no chance to talk now. There will be no opportunity to be rational until all the nations are practically exhausted unless a machinery can be devised to do the thinking and interpreting on neutral ground. *Hence a conference of perpetual mediation, proceeding by a method of simultaneous standing proposals, might prove to have a practical value independent of the willingness of the powers to accept an ideal plan.* Nevertheless it must not be forgotten that whatever modifications may be introduced for discussion later by the

belligerents themselves, the initial standing proposal of the neutral powers should be based on some such universal principles as we have already indicated, for, as we have seen, (1) such a proposal is an expression of the ideal and is therefore worth holding before the imagination of the world; (2) it is a neutral proposal because it is based on abstract principles; (3) it approaches a sound bargain because it is based on principles which govern the welfare of all, and as a sound bargain it may ultimately produce a practical effect on the attitude of the governments.

But let us repeat that it is on the ground of the minimum result that may be expected from prompt action that we desire chiefly to base our argument. We wish to emphasize the point that the awful force of human anguish will be to a certain extent dissipated and wasted unless it can in some way be concentrated to drive the idea of world peace into the minds of the people. It is the task of the neutral powers to put the psychological screws in place and let nature turn them by the relentless pinch of physical fact. If a single belligerent government could be induced to commit itself, though of course conditionally, to the sound programme, that were a hitherto unparalleled triumph for the cause of pacifism. But even if no such result could be effected, even if the only result were the crystallizing of an avowedly national sentiment in one neutral country and of popular opinion in other lands, the effort would be worth while. And that any government should have taken an historic stand for the radical right would be for all time a source of pride and thankfulness to its people.

But there is a third question to be asked: For the individual believer in the cause of peace, what, under actually existing circumstances, is the natural thing to do? We may say confidently that *there are* more than the prophet's seven thousand in every neutral country who believe ardently in the cause of peace and are willing to put forth their utmost effort in its support. To them we make our appeal. If the course of action which we have outlined is indeed the reasonable one for the neutral nations to follow, if it contains any promise of help, direct or indirect, immediate or future, to the cause of

peace, then the natural thing for the individual to do is to advocate that course in season and out of season, by personal propaganda, through the press, through public meetings, by resolutions of societies, through open letters to persons of authority. When he has striven by every means at his command to gain for the matter the serious consideration of the neutral peoples and the neutral governments, then and not till then has he delivered his soul.

Our task is a definite one. It is the task of persuading the neutral governments to immediate action. We shall on every hand encounter the opinion that when the belligerents are ready for mediation, they can make the move for it without further interference from us; that we shall gain by waiting until they are in a mood to listen to us. Let us in conclusion sum up the principal arguments against this view; (1) Though opposed to armistice and not consciously ready for mediation, the belligerents may in reality be more open than either we or they themselves are aware to a cunningly devised temptation to the course of common sense. (2) They dread speedy settlement because they dread compromise; but a proposal, for example, for the formation of a Peace League and the adjustment of disputes by appeal to the principle of nationality* does not involve the great evil of compromise—namely, the danger of a speedy resumption of hostilities. (3) The warring nations themselves are unwilling to initiate a movement for peace; and in the meantime the peoples are powerless to communicate. For the sake of the welfare of all, for the sake of a dispassionate examination and a universal interpretation, the neutral nations must work out plans and propose them. (4) If a standing proposal is likely to exert a psychological pressure that will tend to hasten the time of settlement, then it is a grave wrong to delay putting it before the belligerents. Though it may not be immediately accepted, yet the sooner it is made, the sooner it

* The principle of nationality is here understood to mean the principle that any racial unit should have freedom to develop according to its own genius, in so far as its development does not interfere with the equal freedom of every other racial unit. Such freedom can be accorded within any unit of government.

will take effect. Dare we delay to act when promptness of action may in the long run save even a week of bloodshed and suffering? (5) A radical proposal made simultaneously to the warring powers would tend to promote not only speedy settlement but sound settlement. It would at the least begin the task which must be begun sometime of bringing the force of sane public opinion to bear upon the conservatism of governments; and now while public opinion is reinforced by economic pressure within the nation and by danger from without, it may be easier to make that force felt than it will be later. (6) The only alternative to prompt action is passive acquiescence in the indefinite continuation of the war—a war that is daily weakening the vitality of Europe, sweeping away the slow gain of centuries, "mortgaging the future of civilization," and bringing inestimable loss upon our children and our children's children.

Shall we wait until these blind and futile forces have spent themselves? The time to make a resolute effort to save our world is *now*, before the destruction has gone any further.

APPENDIX.

The Wisconsin Plan was embodied in the platform of the National Peace Conference at Chicago as follows:

This National Convention of men and women of the United States, assembled in Chicago under the auspices of the Emergency Peace Federation, recognizes the wisdom of the attitude of neutrality toward the European war, so carefully maintained by the President of the United States; but believes that the time has now come for an extension of the principle of neutrality by a conference of neutral nations called to consider the existing international situation.

The organization of modern society has made nations so interdependent that it is no longer possible for two nations to wage war without imposing suffering on all other nations and outraging the universal sense of humanity. No nation can declare war upon another without thereby in some measure declaring war upon all other nations.

We, therefore, respectfully urge that the government of the United States immediately call a conference of the neutral nations of the world. Such a conference should mediate, with armistice if possible, without armistice if necessary, but in such a way as not to endanger the neutrality of any nation; it should constitute a voluntary court of continuous mediation, at least so long as the war should last; it should invite suggestions of settlement from each of the warring nations and submit to all of them simultaneously reasonable proposals, based upon the principles: (1) *that peace must not mean humiliation to any nation; and* (2) *that it must not involve compromise which might result in a renewal of the war. Such a conference should exert every possible effort to prevent any of the neutral nations from becoming involved in the present war.*

RESOLUTIONS OF THE LEGISLATURE OF WISCONSIN.

The following resolutions were adopted by the Wisconsin Legislative Session of 1915:

JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 39, S.

Memorializing the President of the United States to urge a conference of the neutral nations of the world.

WHEREAS, There is now being waged a war of hitherto unequaled destructiveness which is weakening the stamina of entire races and retarding the moral and intellectual progress of all nations, neutral and belligerent alike; and

Whereas, The bitterness between the warring peoples engendered of the strife makes it virtually impossible for the nations engaged, if left to themselves, to open communications looking to peace; and

Whereas, The wisdom and universal brotherhood of the twentieth century should in the name of our common humanity seek to find a reasonable solution of the questions involved in the present war before either side is reduced to exhaustion; and

Whereas, We believe in view of the ever increasing tragedy

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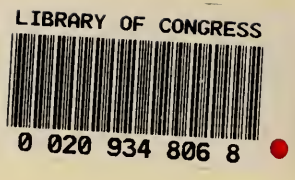
of the war that active efforts should be made to the end, first, that the warring nations should be given the opportunity, without fear of compromise or loss of dignity to consider the possibilities of bringing the war to a close on an honorable basis, and, secondly, that the people of the neutral nations who are appalled at the destruction being wrought and who desire out of the depths of their hearts to help their suffering brothers on both sides of the conflict, should be given an opportunity to do so; and

Whereas, The plan here proposed offers a form of mediation which would leave each neutral and each belligerent alike free to act as circumstances may demand; would judge no one, dictate to no one, coerce no one; would endanger the neutrality of no nation; would marshal the moral forces of the world, and without loss of time bring them to bear on a problem of unparalleled magnitude; and would offer to the warring powers an opportunity to consider all possible pathways to peace without involving humiliation to any or committal to an arbitrary program; therefore be it

Resolved, By the Senate, the Assembly concurring, That the plan for continuous mediation without armistice which was proposed by the Wisconsin Peace Society and adopted by the National Peace Conference at Chicago in February, be respectfully commended to the attention of the President of the United States, and that the Senate and Assembly of the State of Wisconsin respectfully urge the President to call a conference of the neutral nations to sit throughout the war for the purpose of continuous and independent mediation with or without armistice, and if necessary, without the specific permission of the belligerents; such conference to consider and submit simultaneously to the warring powers a reasonable proposition based on principles most favorable to the establishment of a permanent peace, and to continue to seek by the method of simultaneous proposals and by inviting suggestions from the belligerents, some basis of settlement which may appeal to all as worthy of consideration,

And be it further resolved, That a copy of these resolutions, signed by the president of the Senate and the speaker of the Assembly, be forwarded to the President of the United States.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